

THE ROADS HAVE EYES

DVSA traffic enforcement crews are now tapping into the vast pool of data generated by thousands of ANPR cameras ranged around the country to make sure that operators obey the law, reports Will Dalrymple

Like passenger cars, commercial vehicles must carry number plates by law. In addition, every one over 3.5t running in the UK is linked to a transport operator licence. Over the past 15 years, DVSA has developed a network of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras mounted in strategic locations that record every vehicle passing by.

In the past, these were checked against so-called vehicle of interest - VOI - lists consisting of those with no MOT, for example, or associated with operators that have a low score in OCRS, operator compliance risk scheme. Other cameras were linked to road-mounted scales, known as weight-in-motion systems, to check for overloading. But this system is limited in size and scale; its roll-out has been targeted in particular strategic locations.

Now, the dragnet is being widened dramatically; DVSA has gained access to data from more than 10,000 cameras that comprise the national ANPR service (NAS). The system's primary benefit is that provides simple evidence of a vehicle being used on the road, as ANPR takes a photograph of the vehicle as it passes the camera, a bit like a fixed speed camera does, says Dell Evans, DVSA enforcement transformation manager.

For more than a year, DVSA has been

conducting trials on this. As to its current status, Evans states: "At this stage we are still in a discovery phase and the NAS system is still being further enhanced, but it has proven that its use will be a step change in our ability to identify road safety risks."

SOME FEATURES LIVE

He adds that some elements of the scheme are still to be tested, while others are now live, such as the ability to search for a time/date stamp against a vehicle that examiners suspect of offending. According to DVSA's own published ANPR rules, authorised DVSA users can access 90 days of ANPR data freely, and data up to a year old if they have permission of the information asset owner, or if it's a serious investigation. Data is deleted after 12 months unless previously stored as evidence.

Trials have evaluated several aspects



of the NAS system, confirms Evans. It can broaden previous searches for vehicles running on the road without an MOT, or vehicles of operators whose licence has been revoked.

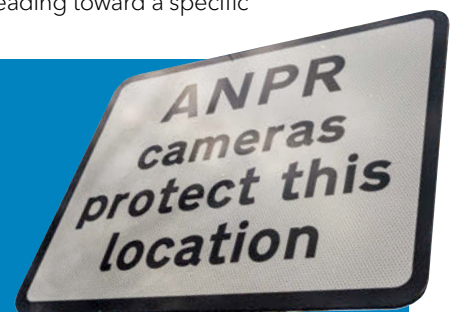
But that's the least of it, he adds. "Such a large data set can be used both strategically and tactically to identify risk by time of day and day of week; for example, to support a decision on when is best to conduct a road check, and with how many examiners. Strategically, it can provide data in the form of heat maps against traffic flows, and used to identify where the highest potential road safety risk."

Similarly, DVSA examiners can draw on the ANPR network in real time, and use it to target vehicles heading toward a specific

WHAT IS ANPR GOOD FOR?

DVSA officers can use the ANPR network to enforce:

- Lack of MOT
- Driving in excess of drivers' hours limits
- Illegal operator: no O-licence, or licence revoked
- Tachograph fraud
- Illegal driving instruction (on light vehicles)
- When combined with OCRS, a number of driver and roadworthiness offences





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parked enforcement vehicle. It can also indicate vehicles not to stop, for example those in DVSA's Earned Recognition scheme.

NO ESCAPE

But for the other type of operators, ANPR's coverage of the whole country provides vital breadth to examiners previously limited to certain locations. "For the worst operators and drivers who manipulate their tachographs to enable excess driving, NAS is a very powerful tool. No matter how clever they are with electronic devices to hide driving hours, they cannot get away from a photo with a date/time/location stamp showing the vehicle driving on the road," says the DVSA enforcement transformation manager.

The power of NAS is multiplied when checked against other databases, according to Evans, by continuing to refine vehicle of interest lists.

But that doesn't mean the agency has carte blanche to dig into anyone's journeys (see also sidebar). Access to the data requires its own justifications, Evans points out: "We have a number of internal policies which have to align with the National ANPR Standards for Policing & Law Enforcement. In

particular, with NAS access, there is a high level of audit checking to fully comply with the independent national auditor. At a high level, we always need a reason to use ANPR, and for DVSA that is connected to criminal offences and/or for the purpose of road safety." (A revised set of ANPR guidelines were released last month, and are available via www.is.gd/ekexex).

The 2019/2020 traffic commissioners' annual report, published in July, also made mention of the changes. It said: "Resource to follow up our regulatory decisions to revoke, curtail or suspend licences has traditionally been scarce. NAS revolutionises the ability of DVSA to enforce our regulatory decisions. It has also introduced new processes to ensure that there is an appropriate follow-up on all revoked licences to ensure compliance. NAS also appears to have the capability to increase the effectiveness of drivers' hours enforcement. Traffic commissioners welcome its introduction and deployment." **TE**

DATA RIGHTS

Although the ANPR network is vast, UK rules allow rights to those being recorded in the network, according to a government document about those rules published in June (www.is.gd/wetoka).

Data subjects are entitled to request confirmation or denial that their personal information is being processed by the system; access to the data; correction of any error in the data, erasure of the data or restriction of its processing, all in the first instance by emailing anpr@homeoffice.gov.uk. Replies are made within one month. In this context, vehicle of interest (VOI) records will include the number plate plus personal details in certain cases. Those are specified as: "persons suspected of having committed or being about to commit a criminal offence; persons convicted of a criminal offence; persons who are or may be victims of a criminal offence; witnesses or others with information about offences; circumstances of significant public interest (such as vulnerable and missing persons)." However, such requests will only be granted in cases that don't involve gaming the system, in other words which "avoid prejudicing the prevention, detection, investigation or prosecution of criminal offences or the execution of criminal penalties."

If their request is denied, data

subjects can appeal to the information

commissioner to check that the decision is lawful or to lodge a complaint, or even apply to a court for a compliance order.

